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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 5, 1933.

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Subject: "Spring Specials." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U.S.D.A.

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Before spring gets a day older, we ought to stop and talk about making the most of spring garden specials. Perhaps you remember our chat not long ago on spring greens. Two other spring specials ready at this time of year are rhubarb and asparagus. Some of us are fortunate enough to have these in our gardens. Others buy them at the market. In either case, a good thrift rule to remember is: "Use foods when they are in season." That's when they're best and cheapest. Fresh garden foods, just picked, are highest in food value and best in flavor. If you have a garden you can supply your family with plenty of fresh things as they come in season, and put the surplus up for next winter.

If you really believe in economizing, in getting all the good from every food that comes into your kitchen, you'll want to conserve the food value as well as the flavor, color and "appetite appeal" generally in these spring specials. The way you prepare them is what counts.

Take rhubarb, for example. The fresh delicate color and the refreshing tart flavor are two reasons why rhubarb--or pie plant as some people call it--has always been a spring favorite. Rhubarb is the only so-called "fruit", common in our diet, that is the stalk or stem of the plant. And it is a stalk full of juice. So it cooks down very quickly. With a little too much cooking it loses its shape completely. So two points about rhubarb are: Cook it a very short time and if possible with no water. If you are using the tender pink new rhubarb keep the skin on when you cook it. This skin gives a very attractive pink color. If you are using the thicker older stalks with tougher skins, you may find it better to skin the rhubarb before cooking. One of the most popular ways of serving rhubarb is in sauce. You can cook sauce either on top of the stove or in the oven. If you cook it on top of the stove, make a thick sugar syrup first, and then drop half-inch or inch-long pieces of rhubarb in to cook until just tender. The syrup will help the rhubarb keep its shape. And during cooking the water in the rhubarb will thin the syrup. Since rhubarb is very tart, it is better cooked with plenty of sugar. The oven method of making rhubarb sauce is very easy and gives a delicious result. Simply cover pieces of rhubarb with sugar in a covered dish and bake in the oven until tender. Add no water. If you have a glass baking dish, this spring sauce will look especially attractive. For variety you can cook rhubarb with strawberries.

Of course, rhubarb is an old favorite for pie. And it is delicious baked with bananas or made into rhubarb betty. You can can the sauce or put up rhubarb in conserve or marmalade. You can even bottle the juice. Have you ever tried rhubarb conserve made with orange, lemon and nuts? Have you ever tried rhubarb and pine-apple marmalade? Now here's an economy point about using rhubarb. Stalks that are too tough to cook in other ways you can save in the form of juice. Put up the juice in jars or bottles and use it for summer fruit beverages, frozen desserts, jellies and pudding sauces.

Here are the simple directions for canning rhubarb, worked out by the canning specialists at the Bureau of Home Economics. Select young tender stalks. Trim, wash and cut them into half-inch lengths. Then cook them in one of three ways. First, you can boil them in a thick syrup until tender. Or you can add one-fourth as much sugar as rhubarb by measure and bake until tender in a covered dish. Or for use in pies, simply pre-cook in a little water without sugar. Now pack the boiling hot cooked rhubarb in pint or quart glass jars. Process for just five minutes in boiling water. There's your rhubarb ready for winter. By the way, you notice that I mentioned glass jars. The specialists say that rhubarb corrodes tin cans, so the home canner will be safer packing it in glass. By the way, if you want canning directions or if you want directions for bottling rhubarb juice write either to this station or direct to the Bureau of Home Economics, at Washington, D. C.

Some people have an idea that the acid rhubarb contains makes it an undesirable food. It does contain acid, but not in large enough quantities to bother anyone with a normal digestion. But the leaves are not good food. Never eat them.

Every now and then some housewife complains that she can't make rhubarb pie without a soaked, soggy lower crust. So much juice comes out during baking that soaks into the crust. What's the remedy? Here's what the Recipe Lady advises if you would have a perfect rhubarb pie. First, simmer the rhubarb pieces in a very little water a few minutes and drain. Save the juice. When it cools, add corn-starch that has been mixed with sugar and salt and cook until the mixture thickens. Then add the rhubarb and butter. Pour this mixture into a crust which has already been baked--a pastry shell, as the recipe calls it. By the way, whenever you're using very juicy fruit for pie, this general method will prevent a soaked lower crust..

Here it is time for our spring special menu and I haven't said a word about cooking asparagus. I'll save that until Monday.

Here's the menu for a Sunday dinner featuring spring specials. Chuck roast; Browned potatoes; Brown gravy; Creamed new asparagus; Drop biscuit; Salad or chopped celery, cucumber and green pepper on lettuce or of spring greens. For dessert, your choice--either Baked bananas and rhubarb, served hot, or Rhubarb betty or Rhubarb pie.

Once more, that menu. (Repeat.)

Monday. Making the Most of Asparagus.

